



The Center on
Conscience & War

The Reporter for Conscience' Sake

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Air Force Doctor Approved for Discharge as CO



Heather Hammerstedt now putting her skills to use in peace, at her current vocation in Uganda.

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It's always a great day when any of the military branches discharges someone as a conscientious objector. But when the Air Force discharges a doctor as a conscientious objector, that is cause for special celebration! That's because the military, and particularly the Air Force, rarely grants such applications – even when their own Investigating Officer recommends approval and the Chaplain's report is supportive. That's why CCW is excited about the Air Force's approval of

Heather Hammerstedt's CO application on 13 August 2007. Heather is currently a physician from Boalsburg, Pennsylvania, who recently completed her training in Emergency Medicine at the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston.

When Heather accepted a military scholarship in 1999 to attend medical school, she had not thought much about war and knew nothing about the role of the mili-

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News Briefs

FINLAND: Four total objectors sentenced to prison

Four Finnish total objectors received unconditional prison sentences from the Loviisa district court (Loviisan käräjäoikeus) on Tuesday 11th of September. Each of them was charged with “alternative service crime” and each was sentenced to prison as substitute service for the time not yet served at the time of refusal.

The Finnish cabinet is expected to present a new Alternative Service Act to the parliament. The parties represented in the cabinet decided in August to recommend shortening the length of substitute service to 12 months. While this is an improvement, it is not adequate. (At the moment the length of substitute service is 395 days, whereas the basic length of military service is 180 days). According to the Ministry of Labour’s draft law, the imprisonment of total objectors will also continue.

The punitive length of substitute service and other shortcomings of the Finnish legislation concerning conscientious objection have been criticised by the UN Human Rights Commission (November 2004) and Council of Europe’s human rights bodies.

Turkmenistan Arrests Two COs

On 14 June 2007, two Jehovah’s Witness conscientious objectors, Bayram Ashirgeldiev and Nuryagdy Gairov, were detained in Turkmenistan, and have been charged with “evasion of call-up to military service.”

Turkmenistan does not recognize the right to conscientious objection.

Amnesty International reported that Gairov had been arrested before in 1999. He became eligible in 2000 for a prisoner amnesty but refused to swear an oath to the president, a condition of the amnesty. He was subsequently put in an isolation cell and beaten unconscious.

(*War Resisters International, 12 July 2007*)

Turkmenistan Sentences CO to Two Years

Turkmenistan sentenced Begench Shakhmuradov to two years under a suspended sentence, one in a series of crackdowns on conscientious objectors in the last few weeks.

He was sentenced to a year imprisonment in 2005, during which he contracted tuberculosis but was released early under a presidential decree aimed at avoiding the U.S. naming Turkmenistan “a country of particular concern” under the US International Religious Freedom Act.

Shakhmuradov told the court he would be willing to pursue an alternative to military service, but the country does not provide for alternative service.

(*War Resisters' International, 13 SEP 2007*)

GAO Completes Report on Conscientious Objectors in the US Military

On October 1, the Governmental Accountability Office released a report on the distribution and number of COs in the U.S. military. CCW found a few surprises in the report. Please read the Urgent Action Alert on the website and analysis in next the *Reporter*.

CCW Welcomes New Staff Member

Andrew Gorby

Hello, my name is Andrew Gorby. I will be working at the Center on Conscience & War with a focus on lobbying for the rights of conscientious objectors. Aside from answering phone calls as a counselor on the new GI Rights Hotline, I am also interested in

examining the current approach and effectiveness of counter-recruitment.

Currently, I am following the DREAM Act which fails to honor conscientious objector beliefs amongst our undocumented immigrant community and is another tool in the military recruiter's arsenal to boost recruitment (see article on pg. 6).

I firmly believe our brothers and sisters, regardless of legal status, need our support! I am also working on producing a brief synopsis, along with practical advice, for each service's military regulation on conscientious objection.

My childhood was spent in Mississippi, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina. I attended University of Richmond where I studied psychology and religion. I also participated in two years of Army ROTC and was commissioned as an Infantry officer in 2006. After completing my training I asked to be removed from Ranger School so I could pursue my realized conscientious objector beliefs and was honorably discharged



in 2007. I currently reside in Washington DC with my fiancée Ashley.

New BVSer Comes on Board

Thomas Bergman

Hi, my name is Thomas Bergman, and I am coming to CCW from the Brethren Volunteer Service. My hometown is Yellville, Arkansas, a little town with a population a tad over 1,300. Until I was fifteen, my family lived half of each year in Pennsylvania, where my parents sold their hand-crafted jewelry at the Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire. The place I call my *alma mater* is the University of the Ozarks, where I majored in political science with a career track in international relations. I joined Brethren Volunteer Service after graduating and chose CCW as my project. My upcoming year of service will include editing the *Reporter*; counseling GIs on the GI Rights Hotline, and maintaining our donor database. For our work on the GI Rights Hotline, I am currently updating our knowledge of Air Force Regulations, reading hundreds of pages of manuals.



NEW GI Rights Hotline Number!!!

Change the number in your address book to:

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CO Physician

(Continued from Page 1)

tary doctor. She was nominally raised Roman Catholic but had never felt connected to the Church's teachings. In December 2001, her outlook on life changed when one of her closest friends died. That death and the violent deaths and injuries she saw when she worked as a medical student at the emergency room at Temple University Hospital in north Philadelphia, caused her to think about the circles of suffering every person's death causes. She began to look into ways that she could help alleviate suffering, which led her to travel to India in 2003 to study Ayurvedic medicine (traditional Indian medical practices). In India, Heather discovered Buddhism. She began to meditate and to make other changes in her life that would allow her to be a force for positive change in the world.

When she returned to the United States, Heather continued her medical studies but also began to study Buddhism intensely. The more she learned about Buddhism, the more its beliefs and practices resonated with her, and the more she worked to align her life with Buddhist principles. She understood those principles to require her to abstain from hurtful behavior or killing and to act kindly and compassionately. She also came to understand that she must earn her living in a way that comports with Buddhist principles. Although she felt good about her role as a physician in alleviating suffering, she began to question her position as a member of the Air Force.

In March 2006, Heather attended a military Emergency Medicine conference. She had hoped that the conference would help resolve her growing doubts so she could fulfill her obligation to the Air Force. Instead, the opposite happened. When she learned that the primary role of the military physician was to heal soldiers so they could return to carrying on a war, she finally realized that she could not be part of such a system. Like many doctors in the military, Heather had imagined that she could be morally comfortable healing and treating members of the military, as she would any patient, without judging the patient's choices of profession or behavior. It was only when confronted with the unique position of the military

doctor, who is not permitted to make independent professional judgments of whom to treat and to what end, that she concluded that no accommodation of her beliefs was possible. In May 2006, she decided to apply for discharge as a conscientious objector. A month later, with the assistance two attorneys, former CCW Board member Jim Feldman and former CCCO co-general counsel, Peter Goldberger, who practice together in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, she submitted her application.

The military is obligated to conduct a prompt investigation of every CO application, but the Air Force took months to appoint an Investigating Officer, despite Heather's persistent calls and e-mails. The IO hearing eventually took place six months after she had completed her paperwork. Several weeks later, the IO submitted his report recommending that Heather be honorably discharged as a conscientious objector. It then took the Air Force another nine months before the Office of the Secretary eventually granted the application.

Although the process was long and at times frustrating, the Air Force's ultimate recognition of the depth and sincerity of Heather's conscientious objector beliefs should give encouragement to other CO applicants – including other military physicians who come to see an irreconcilable conflict between their oaths as healers and their duties as warriors.



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CCW Staff Meet with Selective Service

On Aug 30 the CCW Staff visited the offices of the Selective Service System. It was an opportunity for our newer staff to get firsthand exposure to the Selective Service System, better understanding its work and mission, and to meet the people we often deal with at Selective Service. It was also an opportunity for the Center to learn if there were any new developments in terms of Selective Service's planning for a draft.

We met with Caassandra Costley, who is in charge of the Alternative Service Program and training, Dan Amon their Public Affairs Specialist, Jenny Nash who is responsible for revisions in the regulations, Gus Jakowitsch and Jennifer Burke.

Selective Service showed us some of their draft board training materials, including a video of a mock CO hearing before a draft board. They emphasized that they want a Draft to be fair and want draft boards to make correct decisions. We discussed some of the feedback--both positive and negative--we have heard from those in our network who are on draft boards and who have been through the training. We asked explicitly how they intend to deal with the prejudices expressed by board members even after going through the training. They do have a plan for additional education of such people and when necessary removing biased board members. It is very clear that the national Selective Service staff want the draft to operate as fairly as possible within the constraints of the law.

The Draftees will go to a Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) to get their physical and get inducted. The regulations state that if there is a problem at the MEPS, the registrant (person getting drafted) can go to the SS Liaison to get things resolved. We wondered as to how that would work: How will a registrant know where to go and find the liaison, and what kinds of help are they really empowered to give? We were surprised to learn that Selective Service had decided to eliminate the liaison at MEPS, since this change had not been reflected in the regulations or procedures manuals. However, Selective

Service indicated that they have now decided that they will have a liaison at the MEPS, but we did not get a clear answer as to how someone getting drafted could find this person and take advantage of any assistance they might be able to provide.

Those who have been through CCW's Draft Counselors Training and long time readers of the Reporter know that Selective Service has two different procedures manuals--RIPS and RIMS. There is also a Board Member Handbook. (Each of these is a full, loose-leaf binder.) Selective Service told us that they intend to write a new manual that will replace all three of these books. They also reiterated that the system they intend to use is the one in the RIPS manual--that's the system that anticipates a 6 month lead time. The RIMS system, on the other hand gives procedures for an emergency draft with only two weeks leadtime. The regulations still support the RIMS system, however, and we discussed this problem. The staff we spoke with seemed genuinely unaware of the extent to which their regulations need to be revised if they ever really move towards an active draft using the RIPS system.

We also learned that the Selective Service plans to revise its training materials and hope to make the simulated hearings more realistic--possibly even trying to find real COs to come before its draft boards in the simulated hearings.

As always, the Center continues to walk that line of cooperating with Selective Service as much as possible to ensure that treatment of COs and other registrants is as fair as possible, yet also maintaining a critical distance since we believe that a draft can never be fair or just. We remain opposed to all forms of conscription.

REMEMBER

THE CENTER ON CONSCIENCE & WAR

IN YOUR WILL!

American DREAM—Or a Nightmare?

by Andrew Gorby, *Legislative Affairs*

I attended an ecumenical gathering of progressive religious governmental advocacy groups the other day. We were gathered to discuss the direction of the Washington Interreligious Staff Community and address essential legislation needed in the struggle for peace and justice. It was an easy meeting to prepare for given that the specific focus of the Center on Conscience & War is conscientious objection.

We went around the small table and introduced ourselves, and then came the time to elaborate on our work and any legislation that we thought essential to the struggle. I started off this period of elaboration by addressing the concerns of the Center in regards to the DREAM Act and conscientious objection. Half-way through my remarks I suddenly became conscious that everyone was extremely alert to what I was saying. Once I finished thumping the DREAM Act, it became clear that nobody had ever thought of the Center's perspective against the DREAM Act. Most "progressive" organizations are in support of the DREAM Act. We need your support in our stance against the DREAM Act.

The DREAM Act, or The Development, Relief and Education of Alien Minors Act, would provide a path to legal status for young people who came to the U.S. as undocumented immigrant children who have completed high school graduation and kept out of trouble. These high school graduates would be eligible to apply for a six year conditional residence permit if they arrived in the U.S. before they were 16 and are able to demonstrate having lived in the U.S. for at least five years. This conditional residence permit would allow them to legally live in the states, obtain a driver's license, find legal employment, and obtain financial aid. (Although, recently language was taken out of the DREAM Act that would have allowed them to be eligible for in-state tuition.) During this six-year period they would be required to complete either two years of a 4-year college degree, community college or technical school OR two years of active-duty military service.

Once having met these requirements in "exemplary moral standing", they would be given resident status ("green card status") and be able to apply for U.S citizenship.

This path to U.S. citizenship is a nightmare. The DREAM Act is a wolf in sheep's clothing, giving undocumented immigrants false hopes for citizenship. Many undocumented immigrants cannot afford college, especially without the option of in-state tuition, which leaves military service as the only viable option. Even if an undocumented immigrant overcomes great statistical odds to attend college, there is a 50% college drop-out rate amongst college students from the immigrant community. For many who drop out of college the "path to citizenship" is as easy as walking into the nearest military recruiting office.

Conscientious objectors who cannot afford college have no route to citizenship. You must affirm you are not a conscientious objector to join the military. This lack of an alternative for COs is in grave conflict with our country's tradition of honoring the right to conscientious objection. No opportunity is given to perform civilian service that would demonstrate the individual's moral aptitude for citizenship. Interestingly, in an earlier version of the measure introduced in 2003 (S.1545) there was a provision that allowed for alternative community service in the USA Freedom Corps.

The military service option ignores the fact that it is impossible to join the military for only two years. The minimum enlistment is eight years, which can be extended by the military, and then there is always the possibility of receiving a discharge which does not reflect exemplary moral standing. Slightly over 25% of people leaving the military do not receive a fully honorable discharge and this figure is significantly higher for minorities. An immigrant who did not receive a fully honorable discharge would lose his or her right to stay in the U.S.

This bill is about military recruitment. It is another tool in the recruiter's arsenal. The current language

of the stripped-down DREAM Act as well as support from the Department of Defense highlights that the objective of this bill is to increase recruits into our armed forces in order to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The bill's chief sponsor, Democratic Senator Richard Durbin of Illinois says, "Many in the Department of Defense believe, as I do, that the DREAM Act is an important part of making certain we have talented young men and women ready to serve in our military." Similarly, Deputy Undersecretary for military personnel policy, Bill Carr, says the bill is a "very appealing" way of getting new recruits. Strangely, Senator Durbin has been an outspoken critic of the Iraq war, voting against the initial invasion and calling for a new direction. Please let him know that sending undocumented immigrants to fight, kill, and possibly die in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is not the right direction!

The Center on Conscience & War is working hard to encourage changes in this measure so it moves in the right direction. We are not only pushing for change to the measure but also trying to persuade other religious governmental advocacy groups that they should not be in support of the current DREAM Act.

J.E. McNeil and I met with Senator Durbin's Legislative Aide taking concerns about the DREAM Act and shared the perspective of the Center. The aide seemed to be quite receptive to our concerns and we hope to see changes in the measure if it is reintroduced in November, but we cannot do it without your help. Please join CCW as we defend and extend the rights of undocumented conscientious objectors and protect the basic rights of our brothers and sisters! Please contact your representatives and let them know how you feel about the current language of the measure, and encourage an alternative service provision to be added. If of a particular faith tradition, it is important that you contact your DC lobbying office and let your voice be heard. We cannot win this struggle for peace and justice without you!

From the Desk of...

(Continued from Back Page)

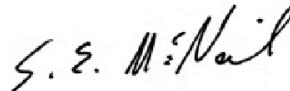
has felt that way at some point. It's easy to get discouraged or cynical—especially when the "peace" community fights among itself.

But change does come. In World War I, the animosity against conscientious objectors to war was so severe that there were 17 DEATH SENTENCES given to COs (albeit later commuted) and 142 sentences to life in prison. The treatment of the COs in prison was so harsh that some 18 COs died. By the time of World War II over two decades later, while the number imprisoned was larger—approximately 5,300—no one was given a death sentence. And Alternative Service was created so that the choice did not have to be prison or noncombatant military service. The creation of Alternative Service arose from the memories and continued work of men and women who did not get discouraged or cynical from their earlier experiences. Men who went to jail in World War I. Men who fought in World War I.

The staff and supporters of the Center have that role now. We cannot get discouraged now while the war continues or when it is finally over for the time being. We must continue to be like the coffee and change the environment in which we all live to one where the occasion for war no longer exists.

We must continue to perk along.

Yours for Peace and Justice,



J. E. McNeil

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From the Desk of the Executive Director

I was reminded recently of the story of a Civil Rights activist who was discouraged. He sat in his mother's kitchen and poured out all his defeats and worries. He told a tale of discouragement, of set backs, loses, and confrontations that seemed only to make matters worse if they changed anything at all. While his mother listened, she put three pans of water to boil on the stove. In one she put a potato, in one an egg and in the third some coffee grounds. When her son had finished, had run down in telling his frustration and anger she showed him the three pans.

"Son, what do you see here?"

Confused he answered, "A potato, a boiled egg and some coffee."

"The potato is soft and mushy," his mother pointed out. "Some people when they face trouble let it destroy them until there is nothing left but mush."

"The egg is hard," she continued. "Some people when they face trouble let it make them hard and unyielding."

"But the coffee grounds stayed the same. They changed the boiling water rather than let it change them," she finished. "Be like the coffee grounds. Don't let your environment change you. You change it."

Often people who start opposing war are like the potato or egg. They jump in with all four feet and feel like now that they get it—that war is wrong—everyone will instantly get it. They set up press conferences, teach-ins, rallies and demonstrations. After awhile the crowds get big and then . . . that war ends.

The crowds go away. And the newly converted will look around in despair because so little seems to have changed. They get burned out—the potato—or cynical—the egg. And they move on to something else.

It is easy to have those feelings. I guess just about everyone who ever stood up and said "No" to war

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